



## MICHIGAN SNOWSPORTS INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION

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### Comments by Mickey MacWilliams to the House Natural Resources, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee February 8, 2011

My name is Mickey MacWilliams and I am the executive director of the Michigan Snowsports Industries Association, which represents Michigan's ski areas, ski and snowboard retailers and other related businesses. On behalf of the snowsports industry, I thank you for the opportunity to address this committee.

The Michigan Snowsports Industry, or MSIA, develops programs to broaden the awareness of skiing and snowboarding and to introduce people to our sports. In Michigan, travel for winter sporting activities is a **\$4.4 billion industry that accounts for one third of the state's leisure travel**. Think about that for a minute if you would. **WINTER ACCOUNTS FOR ONE THIRD OF MICHIGAN'S LEISURE TRAVEL.**

That's easy to understand, once you see some of our world-class resorts, great ski slopes and wonderful snowmobile trails. It's interesting, no matter where you live in Michigan, you are no farther than a two-hour drive to a ski area. Colorado and Utah can't say that! Of the four states that border us – Ohio, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin—when it comes to winter recreation, we're the best game in town. Michigan has more ski areas and more registered snowmobiles than any other state.

**Humans were never meant to hibernate.** We believe that it is important for all of us – especially our children – to get out and exercise during the winter. That's why MSIA has created affordable learn-to-ski programs, and special programs for kids.

MSIA's Discover Michigan Skiing is a statewide learning program run each January. Participants get ski or snowboard rental equipment, a lesson and lift ticket or trail pass, all starting at just \$20. This is a fantastic bargain and a wonderful way to become familiar with the great winter activities that are available to all of us. We've introduced over 125,000 people to our ski slopes and trail through Discover Michigan Skiing.

As a mom, the MSIA program that is dear to me is our Cold is Cool campaign. Because it is so important for our children to "get out, have fun and get healthy" during the winter, MSIA has developed inexpensive school field trips and a special Cold is Cool 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Ski and Ride Passport, which allows all 4<sup>th</sup> graders to ski free all winter long. We chose 4<sup>th</sup> grade because 9- and 10-year-olds are coordinated and fearless enough to learn quickly, and 4<sup>th</sup> grade is also the year that students study Michigan history. What better way to explore our state than on skis in the winter!

The jobs that the travel industry creates can't be outsourced. It would be pretty hard to move one of our ski hills to another state, or outsource the ski lift attendants that go with them! Those jobs will always stay right here. The ripple effect of our industry is felt throughout our state. Gas stations, convenience stores, ski and snowmobile outfitters, restaurants, linen services, beverage distributors and a host of other businesses rely on travelers who head for Michigan's downhill, cross country and snowmobile trails each year.

Michigan has the winter programs, the wonderful ski facilities and unequivocally the best natural resources around. Now, we just need to spread the word! I am pleased to say that this winter, for the first time, MSIA and Travel Michigan partnered on a Pure Michigan co-op advertising campaign. With matching funds, we were able to create radio ads that directed listeners to the Michigan.org website, where they could gain valuable information about winter travel and MSIA's programs. We are in the midst of the campaign now, but I can provide you with some preliminary data. To date, our website visits have increased by 64 percent over last winter. Plus, the pass-throughs from the Michigan.org site to MSIA's site have increased by over 580 percent. This campaign was made possible because legislation during lame duck last year provided \$1.5 million for the Pure Michigan winter ad campaign.

We live in a state that turns cold for three months each year. Let's celebrate this season and bring in additional revenue by showcasing winter sports to our neighboring states.

As you have heard from others, every dollar invested in the Pure Michigan campaign has come back three-fold in sales tax revenue. **We are not asking you to spend, but rather to invest.** On behalf of the snowsports industry – including the resorts, ski areas, Mom and Pop motels, the gas stations, the taverns and restaurants – I am asking you to pass House Bill 4160 to fund the Pure Michigan advertising campaign, and include language to **specifically fund winter advertising.**

It is imperative that the momentum of the Pure Michigan campaign continues. Michigan is truly a winter wonderland. After all, what is more "Pure Michigan," than our driven snow?

Thank you.